

Database search tips

The benefits of searching library databases for sources are that:

- You can focus on reliable, academic sources.
- You can construct your search so that you get the most relevant results and filter out those which are irrelevant.

To get the most out of your database search, follow these 3 steps.

1. First, think about your search terms

You can't search databases using full sentences, so before you start, try and make a **list of keywords and phrases** that you can use as **search terms**.

- If you have an essay title, start with the words that appear in this and then try and think of alternative terms/synonyms that might be used.
- Focus on the main themes of your topic and what questions you're hoping to answer.
- Include any countries/places, authors, literary works, organizations, companies etc. that are relevant.

2. Next, put your search terms together

Use the keywords and phrases from your list. Experiment with different terms to make sure you don't miss anything.

On most databases you'll need to use **AND**, **OR** & **NOT** to combine your search terms:

- Use **AND** to narrow down your search, e.g. children and television.
This will find all references containing both terms.
- Use **OR** to search for alternative terms and broaden your search, e.g. male or masculine.
This will find references containing either or both terms.
- Use **NOT** to exclude a term, e.g. social media not Twitter.

If you want to do a more complex search, combining **AND** & **OR**, put brackets around the OR search, e.g.

Alcohol AND (teenagers OR adolescents)

Gothic AND (fiction OR novels)

Searching for a phrase: You can put phrases in quotation marks if you want to make sure the words are only found together (and not in separate sentences), e.g. "social class"; "climate change"; "nation state"; "Early Modern".

Searching for variations on a word: You can use the root of a word followed by the * symbol to search for alternative endings, e.g. employ* will find employ, employer, employment, employing etc.
poet* will find poet, poetry, poetic etc.

Searching for variations in spelling: You can use ? symbol to replace a character in the middle of a word which might be spelt in different ways, e.g. sociali?ation will find socialization and socialisation
organi?ation will find organization and organisation

3. Filtering out the results you don't want

Most databases will allow you to set limits so that you can filter out results you don't want. Look out for options to limit your search results:

- **By date** – useful if you want to focus on recent material for example.
- **By language** – many databases include material in various languages. You can usually limit results to those in English.
- **By type of publication** – you can often limit your results to articles from scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals. You may also want to find other kinds of sources such as book chapters or reviews.

Too many results?

Your search may be too narrow. Try removing or changing some of your search terms

4. What next?

Some databases such as give you the full text of most articles, often in the form of PDF files that you can save or print. Other databases such as will give you an 'abstract' or summary of the article but not the whole thing. The next step is to find out whether the Library holds that article in print or electronic form.

If you see the **Full Text Finder** icon next to a reference you can click on this to check whether the article is available on one of our other databases and then link to it.